

Institution: Newcastle University
Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Medieval Heritage in the Convents of Northern Germany: Rediscovery, Preservation and Presentation
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Newcastle's extensive and authoritative study of the medieval manuscripts that originated in the Lüneburg convents has led the Protestant successors of these female religious communities to a more informed and in some cases considerably revised interpretation of their medieval heritage. As the convents prepare for the quincentenary of the Lutheran Reformation, they have drawn on the underpinning research to run interactive workshops for the general public on liturgical singing and calligraphy and mount new exhibitions in their museums for the thousands of visitors visiting the convents.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The continuity in the history of the convents in Northern Germany from the Middle Ages to the present day is exceptional, with the medieval communities of religious females surviving the Reformation and the secularisation of subsequent centuries intact. Thus the members of the present day Protestant communities are the direct successors to the nuns of the Middle Ages. The Lüneburg convents, in particular Medingen, have been the focus of Newcastle research. Within Northern Europe these convents constitute a unique repository not only of late medieval devotional texts but also of material culture.</p> <p>Henrike Lähnemann (Professor of German Studies, 2006-current) has systematically developed her research from an initial analysis of individual prayer books (1) right through to the mapping of the religious landscape of Northern Germany in the late Middle Ages (6). The bilingual (Latin/Low German) devotional manuscripts of Medingen are the most complex and rich sub-set from this remarkable material and form the core of Lähnemann's research. After the Reformation these texts were scattered across Europe and now even as far as America, to the university libraries of Harvard and Michigan. Lähnemann has tracked down over fifty of these manuscripts and has systematically catalogued, edited, analysed and contextualised them. Furthermore, she has brought the manuscripts together as a digital collection thereby making them accessible to the wider public. Through the application of perspectives informed by codicology, regional history, art history, music history, literary and linguistic analysis, it is possible to explore the collective devotional identity of a particular female religious house (Medingen) in both its social and its cultural context. .</p> <p>The Latin and Low German devotional manuscripts, both mono- and bilingual, produced in the Northern German convents around 1500 have proved a rich source for the nuanced interpretation of one of the most formative periods in the shaping of modern Europe. The starting point for the underpinning research was an investigation of the materiality of the prayer-books as cultural indicators (2), for example, parchment strips taken from discarded manuscripts that were then sewn into the garments made by the nuns for the wooden figures of Christ and the saints (4). This led to a linguistic analysis of the bilingual writing (3), which in turn led to a re-evaluation of the education the nuns received (1). The conclusions drawn challenge the prevailing view of nuns' limited agency in pre-Reformation times (5), demonstrating how these women decisively influenced the religious, cultural and intellectual development of a regional network that incorporated not only the convents but, via the prosperous salt town of Lüneburg, the entire Hanseatic League. The new insights and knowledge yielded by this research were instrumental in the formation of a research network focused on 'Northern German Mysticism and Devotion' (6) which broke new ground by studying convents as intellectual, cultural and religious hubs which shaped Northern Germany as a key European region in the late Middle Ages.</p>

3. References to the research

1. Lähnemann, H. (2009) *Per organa*. Musikalische Unterweisung in Handschriften der Lüneburger Klöster, in: *Dichtung und Didaxe*, ed. by H. Lähnemann & S. Linden, 397-412. REF2 Output: 162482.
2. Lähnemann, H. (2010) Schnipsel, Schleier, Textkombinatorik. Die Materialität der Medinger Orationalien, in: *Materialität in der Editionswissenschaft*, ed. by M. Schubert, 135–146.
3. Lähnemann, H. (2012) *Also do du ok*. Andachtsanweisungen in den Medinger Handschriften, in: *Text und Normativität*, ed. by F-J Holznagel / E. Brüggem, 437-453.
4. Lähnemann, H. (2013) Text und Textil. Die beschriebenen Pergamente in den Figurenornaten, in: *Heilige Röcke. Kleider für Skulpturen in Kloster Wienhausen*, ed. by C. Klack-Eitzen, W. Haase, T. Weißgraf, 71-78 (& catalogue on 79-173)
5. Lähnemann, H. (2013) & Hascher-Burger, U., Liturgie und Reform in Kloster Medingen. Edition und Untersuchung des Propst-Handbuchs Oxford Bodleian MS. Lat. liturg. e. 18
6. Lähnemann, H. (2013) Bilingual Devotion. The Relationship of Latin and Low German in Prayer Books from the Lüneburg Convents, in: *Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by E. Andersen & H. Lähnemann, 317-341.

All references can be supplied by the HEI on request.

4. Details of the impact

The underpinning research has made a direct contribution to preserving and presenting the medieval cultural heritage of the Northern German convents. The Protestant female communities who now inhabit these convents are keenly interested in learning more about their spiritual and cultural heritage, which is present in their everyday life as they are the custodians of its medieval buildings, tapestries, archives, libraries and art works. The Abbess of Medingen comments on the significance of the collaboration with Lähnemann: *“It [the link to academic research] is very important for us today and I see it as an obligation, as Medingen has always been concerned with both learning and religion, not to lose sight of either of these. And with Professor Lähnemann – it just all comes together beautifully; I think this kind of collaboration is a highly sustainable model for the future” (IMP1)*. The research brought significant new insight and knowledge about the period and as a result led to a more informed and in some cases considerably revised interpretation of their medieval heritage by these communities. As a direct result, new knowledge is being used to inform new displays, exhibitions and the information shared with the thousands of visitors who visit the convents annually (IMP2).

Lähnemann’s engagement with the convents has led to a fruitful chain of instruction and knowledge-sharing, as the Abbess of Lüne highlights: *“We are of course very curious about our medieval heritage and want to know more about the inscriptions and manuscripts. We cannot interpret them fully by ourselves and Prof Lähnemann can say much more about them, information which we are delighted to make use of, as we will do this afternoon when 25 of our voluntary tourist guides meet We convent residents cannot manage to show the several thousands of visitors per year around by ourselves and thus it is important that the guides too benefit from Prof Lähnemann’s knowledge” (IMP3)*.

This productive collaboration has resulted in an overhaul of convent museum exhibitions, websites and brochures for tourist visitors. A tour guide at Mariensee describes the benefits of the annual training led by Lähnemann as an *“absolute highlight”*, expressing the infectious enthusiasm with which Lähnemann re-created the environment of a medieval scriptorium and the performance of the liturgy in all its materiality: *“...the detailed knowledge she shares with us enhances our own general knowledge about the history and art treasures of the convent ... In a similar manner, we can now pass on our knowledge, something from which school classes in particular benefit” (IMP4)*.

Another example where the underpinning research had direct influence is in the setting up of a new convent museum at Mariensee in 2007, intended to convey basic knowledge of Protestant

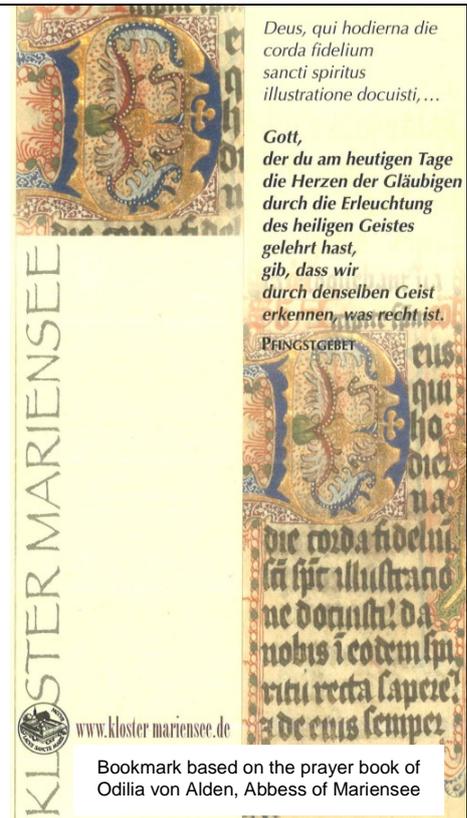
Impact case study (REF3b)

convents to a broad audience. The Abbess of Mariensee confirms that the convent museum “*evolved from a suggestion by Prof. Lähnemann*” and added “...*the question of how to present the only medieval manuscript [of a prayer book] still existing in the convent developed into an intense dialogue. We were able to profit from both Prof Lähnemann’s research and practical knowledge*” (IMP5). Evidence of the transfer of knowledge is captured in the production of a bookmark [see image] which has on it the translation and contextualisation of a particular passage from this prayer book. This emblematic bookmark is distributed not only locally at Mariensee but also nationally through the hundreds of visitors who attend the *Kirchentage* [nation-wide Protestant gatherings]. Here workshops take place that use the sample prayer on the bookmark to teach participants how a medieval nun would have written.

Lähnemann’s research is extending its impact further as evidenced by her appointment as a consultant for a new project to turn a side chapel in St John’s, the main church of Lüneburg, into an exhibition space to document its spiritual heritage. The Lutheran Superintendent of Lüneburg describes Lähnemann’s comments on the fragments of a liturgical manuscript as an “*eye-opener*” which “*allow us to re-enact parts of it with our guests and those preparing for confirmation and to show them the differences between modern and medieval reading*” – thereby informing their own, contemporary, spirituality (IMP6).

As a direct result of the research being conducted, several of the medieval manuscripts from Medingen have now been fully digitised. Through a link on the convent website (IMP7) these manuscripts have, as it were, been returned to the convent. This “home coming” of the manuscripts received widespread coverage in the local press. For example, the article ‘Von Medingen nach Michigan. Eine Detektivgeschichte’ [‘From Medingen to Michigan. A Detective Story’] recounts the journey of one medieval manuscript from the convents to the United States, and appears in a 4-page colour weekend supplement to the *Allgemeine Uelzener Zeitung* (circulation: 16,499) (IMP8).

Through Lähnemann’s collaboration with practitioners, the underpinning research has also changed aspects of professional practice. For example, the transcription and contextualisation of text fragments enabled two textile restorers from the Klosterkammer Hannover [the Board responsible for the convents] to gain valuable insights about some small garments. As a result, they continue to adopt a more holistic approach in their analysis and cataloguing, now working with a range of scholars from other disciplines. This collaboration also resulted in a shared publication (4) and provoked lively interest at a public presentation in the convent of Lüne (IMP10) and when it was featured in the ‘Heimatkalendar Uelzen 2012’, the calendar distributed by all local firms to their customers as a Christmas gift (IMP9). The collaboration also made the national news when subsequently one of the garments was chosen for the exhibition ‘Rosenkränze und Seelengärten’ to make devotional life in the convents tangible to the wider public. This integration of state-of-the-art research into a popular exhibition was very positively reviewed in the German newspapers, not least the leading broadsheet *FAZ* [Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung]. (IMP10)



Bookmark based on the prayer book of Odilia von Alden, Abbess of Mariensee

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(IMP1) Video interview with Abbess of Medingen (27 March 2013). Available at: <http://youtu.be/Q7QnVsH3ZiM>. In German with English subtitles.

(IMP2) Visitor Statistics for the convents of Medingen, Lüne, Mariensee, and Ebstorf, showing the attraction of the Lüneburg Heath and its medieval convents to international tourists.

Impact case study (REF3b)

- Emails from individual convents are available on request.
- (IMP3) Video interview with Abbess of Lüne (28 March 2013). Available at: <http://youtu.be/pkQWBCaY4GQ>. In German with English subtitles.
- (IMP4) Statement by Barbara Werhahn, a local volunteer from the village, who acts as Tour Guide for school children in the convent of Mariensee (20 May 2013). Available on request, in German with English translation.
- (IMP5) Video interview with Abbess of Mariensee (28 March 2013). Available at: <http://youtu.be/hCs9LSSR5tU>. In German with English subtitles.
- (IMP6) Video interview with Superintendent of the Lutheran Region of Lüneburg (27 March 2013, St John's Church in Lüneburg). Available at: <http://youtu.be/s29U-SxwbWQ>. In German with English subtitles.
- (IMP7) Newly developed website for the convent of Medingen featuring links to Lähnemann's publications (e.g. the [exhibition catalogue](#) and the [database of the manuscripts hosted at Newcastle](#)) and the digitised manuscripts from around the world (www.kloster-medingen.de → Historisches → Medinger Handschriften).
- (IMP8) "Von Medingen nach Michigan. Eine Detektivgeschichte", 4-page colour weekend supplement 'Heidewanderer' to the *Allgemeine Uelzener Zeitung* published 6 July 2013 (circulation of 16,499 copies), which traces the journey of a medieval manuscript from the convents to the States in the form of a detective story. Original German version and English translation available on request.
- (IMP9) "Handschriften im Hasenpelz" (Manuscripts under rabbit fur), popular account of what new manuscript findings tell us about the devotional activities of medieval nuns, distributed through the local calendar for Uelzen 2012. Available at: <http://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/henrike.laehnemann/>
- (IMP10) "Bücher, Bildung, Blütenkranz" (Books, Learning, Garlands), full page FAZ article (4 April 2013, p. N4). Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/kylubxbw4hhevcs/IMP10-FAZ03042013.pdf>.